

Museum and Cultural Advisory Board - Meeting Minutes

The Museum and Cultural Advisory Board met in a regular meeting at the Mesa Arts Center, One East Main Street, third floor, south Studios conference room, on December 10, 2008.

Members Present:

Hector P. Benitez Kent Layton
Douglas Brimhall Lars Nielson, Jr.
Amanda Buscas Rebecca Nolan
Peter G. Cook Andrea Soto
Daniel (DJ) Harper

Members Absent:

S. Vicente Fernandez
Ramona Tecumseh

Staff Present:

Johann Zietsman Rob Schultz
Tom Wilson Sunnee Spencer
Jean Kaminski

Peter Cook, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Peter Cook, Chair, called for any corrections/additions/deletions to the minutes of November 12. There being none, Dr. Kent Layton moved to approve the minutes of November 12, Douglas Brimhall seconded. Board members present unanimously approved the minutes of November 12 and they are posted on the City's Webpage.

Items from Citizens Present:

There were no citizens present.

Discuss and take Action – Consider New Fees at Arizona Museum of Natural History – Tom Wilson

Arizona Museum of Natural History is challenged to maximize cost recovery this fiscal year. To that end, the Museum conducted an analysis comparing Valley like venues as well as regional like venues' admission fee structures with Arizona Museum of Natural History's current admission fee structure to determine a fair market value of the products and services rendered to the public. Dr. Wilson reviewed their findings and proposed the following changes: From \$9 to \$10 for adults; from \$5 to \$6 for children 3 to 12 years of age; from \$8 to \$9 for seniors 65 and older; from \$7 to \$8 for students; and for groups, from \$6 to \$7 for adults groups of 10 or more; however children's groups would remain at \$4, the current fee. Costs related to the admission fee changes would be minor, i.e., sign in main lobby, Website, and published materials. The Museum would like to implement the new admission fees by January 1, 2009.

The increase in fees would allow the Museum to generate additional revenue for the upcoming, challenging fiscal year and beyond. Dr. Wilson stated that the City of Mesa has been good to them by recently allowing the Museum to share revenue earned over the projected budgeted amount. The increased fees will afford the Museum an opportunity to earn additional income for the City of Mesa and for the Museum itself. With the current budget cuts, the Museum is losing four more staff members (in addition to losing half their staff and half their budget two years ago). If they can generate more revenue, they would be able to retain two full time employees.

Daniel (DJ) Harper commented that Arts and Cultural needs to retain quality staff in order to maintain quality programming. He continued to say that he appreciates the efforts of staff to find ways of doing that and also appreciates that the City is rewarding those efforts through revenue sharing; however, he encourages the City to generate other sources of revenue to assist City Departments through means such as implementing a secondary property tax that would cover the bond debt. By doing so, general fund monies would be freed from the debt and City Departments would be able to use that money to ensure quality programs for its citizens.

There was concern that another \$1 increase in admission fees (along with the addition of a \$1 increase over the past two years, totaling a \$3 increase over three years) would discourage patrons. Dr. Wilson stated that surveys show that a \$1 increase for most people is tolerable in this financial climate and that the total admission fee for the Museum would still be of fair market value for patrons. He also commented that Target continues with the "3 for Free" Sundays that allows those who cannot afford the admission fee to experience the Museum the first Sunday of each month for free.

Dr. Kent Layton moved that the Board approve the proposed admission fee changes, Daniel (DJ) Harper seconded, and the Board members present unanimously approved the proposed admission fee changes.

Discuss and Provide Direction – Review Marquee Use Policy – Johann Zietsman

The Policy and Guidelines for Marquee Messages document was distributed to the Board in their packets for review. The question again was raised regarding sharing advertising with Mesa Convention Center and the use of their marquee. Johann Zietsman responded that Mesa Arts Center has had discussions with the Director of the Mesa Convention Center and will continue to explore the possibilities.

Daniel (DJ) Harper asked if the marquee was purchased through Mesa Arts Center for its programming. Mr. Zietsman stated that the majority of the messages will be for Mesa Arts Center with a minor portion being used by renters/sponsors as they relate to events at Mesa Arts Center and other City events that relate to arts and culture that fall within the policy/guidelines.

Hector Martinez asked who determines what is posted on the marquee. Mr. Zietsman said that marketing staff is assigned with that responsibility.

Discuss and Provide Direction – Present Draft Document of Staff Talking Points – Peter Cook

Daniel (DJ) Harper reported that the sub-committee met after staff had submitted their talking points and they created a document that was distributed to the Board members present. The document is a tool for the Board to use when speaking with legislators and the public regarding arts and cultural issues. The sub-committee selected four topics and supplied information on those topics; they are: Cultural Facilities are Important to Mesa Public Schools and Young People in General; Arts and Culture Encourages Economic Development; Arts and Culture Have a Strong Community Impact; and a list of awards received in the Arts and Cultural Department along with some misconceptions about arts and culture in Mesa. Mr. Harper requested additional information such as anecdotes from staff to support specific topics, as well as additional information on awards received. Staff were asked to e-mail the information to Mr. Harper.

Staff Reports

Arizona Museum for Youth (AMY) – Sunnee Spencer

- An invitation to the opening of the new exhibit, "Dominic Benhura: African Stone Sculpture," tomorrow evening, December 11, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. was distributed. The artist is in Zimbabwe right now, but will be at the Museum on Saturday, January 31. The exhibit is in collaboration with Scottsdale's Zuva Gallery and the Arizona Commission on the Arts.
- The "Dia de los Muertos" exhibition closed on November 30. The exhibition was successful.
- The Museum engaged in several community projects: "Toys for Tots," which aids the Mesa Fire Department in providing new toys for children in need for the holidays and will run through November and early December; and the "Be Thankful Canned Food Donation", which ran throughout November to assist the United Food Bank in Phoenix.
- Katy Hanchett and Elizabeth Ozello, undergraduates at ASU majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies, loved their internship at the Museum so much that they have returned on their own time to work on projects they started while at the Museum.
- The Museum celebrated their 30th anniversary for donors on December 6.
- The Museum is conducting a "Holiday Membership Mania" campaign through the holidays. Because of the economy, museums are seeing a drop in memberships as well as attendance and in Gallery Shop revenues.
- The Museum's Gallery Shop has been run by the Arizona Museum for Youth Friends organization for three years. The only year the Gallery Shop made net revenue was during the "Henson" exhibition, which was slightly above breaking even. It has been decided to close the Gallery Shop during the renovations with the hope of re-opening in fall of 2009. The Shop will go to approximately half the space it is now. Staff has been tracking sales, and some of the more popular items will be available for sale at the front desk of the Museum until the renovation is completed. The largest cost of operating the Gallery Shop has been staff. Using volunteers to staff the Gallery Shop has not proven to be successful and it requires staff oversight. With the budget cuts and loss of staff, the Museum will go to a new model that will incorporate the Store and the front desk staff who will be cross-trained to take admissions and store sales. The Museum may use the current store space for an art lab/creativity lab that would be connected to ArtVille 2.0 (still in planning stage), or as a space for birthday parties.
- Through the "Ubuntu" project, the Museum's ability expert is updating their Website. Once completed, the Museum will be able to take on-line donations, membership donations, and have on-line store sales.
- Three full time staff were affected by the RIWF: Shelly White who has been with the Museum for 18 years and will take early retirement; Rex Witte, exhibition designer, is another; and Rhonda Simms, Administrative Assistant, is the third. All difficult business decisions to have to make and of concern as to how the Museum can move forward with a skeleton staff. The Museum will go from six to seven exhibits per year to four, maybe five per year.
- Ken Schutz, Executive Director of the Desert Botanical Gardens, proposed collaborative advertising at one of the museum meetings for anyone who would be interested. AMY took him up on his offer and they have an ad in the Botanical Gardens magazine and AMY put their ad in the monthly newsletter.

Amanda Buscas inquired whether the workshops would continue. Ms. Spencer replied that some of the older kid's classes have been cut.

Arizona Museum of Natural History (AzMNH) – Tom Wilson

- Following a collaborative meeting of the Arts and Cultural Department and Police Department, a joint grant was submitted by AzMNH and the Police Department for a CDBG grant to allow for an after school program for underserved and at risk students.
- Jerry Howard, Curator of Anthropology, has finished his part in a grant to the National Science Foundation that is partnering with Arizona State University. The Museum's part of that is for dating of the Riverview Park excavations and possibly for an exhibition on the subject of dating the findings.
- City Council has approved the conservation easement for the Mesa Grande project, which clears the way for the Museum to receive their \$100,000 grant.
- Bob McCord, Curator of Paleontology, uses December to work on his reports to the Federal agencies regarding the field work he has done over the year. He is also refurbishing in his area of the Museum (natural history) on the fossil collections. Dr. Wilson offered a tour to the Board once the work is completed.
- "MARS!" opened on November 7, and he invited the Board to come and see this exciting, interesting exhibition.

Mesa Arts Center/Mesa Contemporary Arts – Rob Schultz

- Fall classes ended the semester down 16% in student registration (999 total students); however, revenue was up 10%.
- Staff met with Mesa Community College (MCC) administrators on the contract for FY09-10. There is one issue that needs to be ironed out and that is whether or not MCC will be able to pay for facility maintenance/restoration fee (use fee). If they cannot afford the "use fee" a decision will need to be made whether or not Mesa Arts Center can afford to offer classes for them without the fee.
- Mesa Contemporary Arts (MCA) revenue is down by approximately 8%; however admission is up approximately 10%, which means more people are attending on "free" days.
- Stageworks ended their "Senora Tortuga" run just under 4,000 attendees with approximately \$20,000 in revenue. Lower than we like to see; however, this was Mesa Arts Center's first attempt at taking Stageworks into Phoenix's Herberger Theater to expose those on that side of town to our programming; it proved a success.
- Volunteers contributed 4,900 hours for a savings to the City of \$95,000. Volunteers work throughout the campus as docents, assistants in the classrooms, admin support, free festivals, and ushers in the theaters.
- The Holiday Art and Music Festival, November 22, saw approximately 8,000 participants. Staff received positive feedback from the artists who displayed their works at the festival.

Director's Report – Johann Zietsman

Performing Live is experiencing challenges in Box Office. Ticket sales are off by 12 – 15% below projections. This trend is being seen throughout the Valley.

Johann Zietsman shared a Power Point presentation that he presented to Council last Thursday, December 4. The presentation opened with the Department's Vision: engage entertain educate *everybody!* He reviewed the Department's Value (what we offer) and the Department's challenges and solutions. The next slide compared Department performance and revenue from FY06-07 vs. FY07-08 (two years where we operated similarly under the same economic climate), which clearly shows that Arts and Culture contributed toward the welfare of the City of Mesa. This was followed by new initiatives for the Department which includes: blockbusters, free Sundays, dinner and a show, Friday Night Out, corporate classes, community events, partnerships, shared resources, and "Shop Mesa." In FY08-09 the City of Mesa funded 56 percent (%) of the Department's direct budget; in FY09-10 the Department's direct funding from the City is projected to be 47%. This was accomplished by reducing the Department's budget by 30% (directive from the City Manager); defining a reduction strategy; identifying how to manage the reduction; and sharing resources within the Department.

The impact of a 30% reduction in the Department's budget included the loss of approximately 19 positions; reducing the operations/programming budgets by \$1.5M; reducing the number of exhibitions/programs; reducing education programming; and the reduction in hours of operation.

The final slide presented the contributed share from the City (Qualify of Life and General Fund) and Arts and Culture's contribution to the budget. In FY03-04, the City contributed approximately 88% and Arts and Culture slightly more than 12%; in FY04-05, City of Mesa contributed approximately 91%, Arts and Culture less than 10%; FY05-06, City of Mesa contributed approximately 61% and Arts and Culture approximately 48%, FY07-08, City of Mesa contributed 66% and Arts and Culture contributed 33%; FY08-09, City of Mesa contributed approximately 56% and Arts and Culture close to 45%; and the projection for FY09-10 is, City of Mesa contributing approximately 46% and Arts and Culture approximately 53%. Although this is a significant turn-around, it is slightly artificial since it is achieved because of the cuts. It is not a realistic or sustainable, long-term goal, but certainly a move in the right direction. The Arts and Cultural Department has made great strides to reduce its reliance on support from tax dollars.

Daniel (DJ) Harper commented that he greatly regrets the loss of 19 jobs, Mr. Zietsman echoed his comment. Mr. Harper expressed his concern for the quality of programs/exhibits, etc. and again, encouraged the Council to consider implementing a secondary property tax which would pay the bond debt, freeing money for the general fund and quality services.

Mr. Zietsman stated that it is unfortunate to lose staff when they have done nothing wrong, especially in an economy that has few jobs to offer.

Amanda Buscas said that she is concerned about the loss of expertise. She asked if staff had the opportunity to bump if they had seniority. Mr. Zietsman said that job families were created within each Department, and a staff member with more retention points was able to bump if there was a position open in that job family. Bumping, more often than not, means a reduction in pay.

Douglas Brimhall asked how the morale was among staff. Mr. Zietsman replied that it has been tough. He has maintained open communication with staff as much as possible. At the Department-wide staff meeting last week, Mr. Zietsman invited a representative from the Employee Assistance Program to speak. She told of the services they provide and left literature for staff. The Reduction in Work Force has been difficult for those laid-off as well as those employees who remain. There are feelings of guilt, sadness, fear, anxiety, and resentment to deal with from both sides.

Daniel (DJ) Harper asked to have the position titles of those affected listed.

At Mesa Arts Center, they are: Marketing/Communications Coordinator, Office Assistant II, Mesa Contemporary Arts Registrar, Mesa Contemporary Arts Preparator, Operations Supervisor, Performing Artist Relations Coordinator (was full time going to part-time), Custodian, Arts and Cultural Specialist (part-time position), three Performing/Visual Arts Specialists, Financial Administrator, Theater Technician, Stageworks Technical Supervisor, Accounting Specialist, and Box Office Representative/Lead Usher (part-time).

Arizona Museum for Youth: Museum Program Coordinator, Youth Museum Exhibition Designer, and Office Assistant II (in addition to losing half their staff two years ago).

Arizona Museum of Natural History: Custodian, two Administrative Support Assistant I's, and Museum Collections Specialist (in addition to losing half their staff two years ago).

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Johann Zietsman, Director
Arts and Cultural Department